

## ***Thoughts and Hunches,***

## ***Making Money in Bunches, and***

## ***Sucker Punches***

With Covid-19 suspending all sports - and all other activities, for that matter - we're now finally back in an unprecedented August that has all sports back (with football being the lone exception, but we're only a month away from that starting). The NBA and NHL are never played during August, so when those two are added to IRL, Nascar, MLB, worldwide soccer, and the PGA, sports fans should be thrilled right now with all the action available to watch.

### **MLB**

The MLB got underway with a modified schedule (60 regular season games) a month ago and are already at the quarter point of the season. In a 60-game season, it's easier for teams to get hot and steal a playoff spot in the expanded system this year than it would be in a normal 162-game campaign, where the cream always seems to rise to the top.

In the American League, the Yankees (+350 to win the World Series), Twins (+1400), and A's (+2200) are all off to hot starts - to nobody's surprise - while other pre-season favorites like the Rays (+1800), Astros (+1100), and Indians (+2200) are all struggling out of the gate. When healthy, the Yankees are clearly the class of the league with boppers Giancarlo Stanton (already on the 10-day IL), Aaron Judge, and Gary Sanchez adding to a formidable rotation headlined by Free Agent acquisition Gerrit Cole leading the way. The two biggest issues for the Yankees are their health, which is always an issue, and the fact that Yankee Stadium will not be a major home field advantage with no fans this season come October. The A's and Twins are both loaded with talent, and both teams could go into Yankee Stadium and steal a series come postseason time; and while both Minnesota and Oakland have deep bullpens, their starting rotations must stay healthy and deliver down the stretch. With the Astros' issues of sign stealing now gone, the fact that they don't have to face unruly road fans calling them "cheaters" could also work in their favor, but Houston has to pick up the pace after a slow start.



NL MVP + Los Angeles Dodger Cody Bellinger

The National League, like the American, has a clear-cut favorite... and it's the Dodgers (+380), who have been the best team in the NL for about five seasons now. The continued development of an unbelievable farm system always has the Dodgers at the top of the heap, as reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger (whose grandparents are Greek and whose father played for Greece in the 2004 Olympics), Cory Seager, and Josh Turner lead an offense that will slug with anyone, and the NL's best rotation - led by the ageless Clayton Kershaw and young gun Walker Buehler - shows no signs of slowing down. The competition for Los Angeles this season will come from Atlanta (+1300), the Cubs (+2000), and the defending World Series Champion Nationals (+2000). The Braves are young, brash, and very good, but losing rotation ace Mike Sirota last week for the season to an Achilles tear can't look good, even if the Braves got an early boost from Greek Nick Markakis, who originally opted out of the season due to Coronavirus concerns, but came back last week to deliver a walk-off homer in the 9th to beat Toronto. The Cubs are off to a red-hot start with surprising pitching helping out their offense, which just keeps rolling. The surprise of the NL in the early-going has been Colorado (+4000) which has shown that yes, good pitching can exist in the Rocky Mountains. If you're looking for another Greek with great odds to back, you can't go wrong with Mike Moustakas and his Cincinnati Reds (+3000), who are a middling .500 team right now but can surprise lots of folks down the stretch.



Atlanta Brave  
Nick Markakis



Cincinnati Red  
Mike Moustakas

As far as predictions go, it's still way too early to make any **BOLD** takes, but I like Minnesota and Oakland in the American League, based on their value. And while the Dodgers are the overwhelming favorite in the NL, something happens to them every October, so I'm going to ride with Atlanta and the Cubs until LA proves they can win when it counts.

## NBA

The NBA has been back for a few weeks, and while viewership is way down (over 20%), the bulk of the season had been played prior to the shutdown in March. Teams are basically just jockeying for playoff position, which probably won't matter once the playoffs begin, due to the lack of fans. Whether you believe their politics that are front and center or not, or their silence of China, more eyes will undoubtedly be on the NBA once the playoffs begin in two weeks.



Giannis Antetokounmpo, AKA "The Greek Freak"

Giannis Antetokounmpo, AKA "The Greek Freak," who already took home last season's MVP award and is a slam dunk to win it again this season, leads the Eastern Conference's Milwaukee Bucks (+250 to win the NBA Finals). Behind Giannis is a deep and healthy squad with Khris Middleton and Eric Bledsoe providing scoring when Giannis can't. Barring any big time upsets in the early rounds of the playoffs, the defending champion Toronto Raptors (+1200) and the Boston Celtics (+1800) look like the biggest obstacle for the Bucks. Boston has the talent and can score with anyone, but - believe it or not - the team that nobody seems to take seriously is Toronto. After losing 2019 Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard to the Western Conference, the Raptors haven't skipped a beat; they have everything the Bucks have and more, including experience.

The Western Conference has the two LA franchises and everyone else. The media seems to be all over a Lakers (+250) vs. Clippers (+310) Western Conference Finals, but Houston (+1400) and Denver (+2500) can create roadblocks to the media's dream matchup. LeBron James and Anthony Davis are the most potent 1-2 punch in the Association, but without Avery Bradley (who opted out due to Covid-19 concerns) and Rajon Rondo (who suffered an injured wrist), the Lakers are in more trouble than they might think. If fans were allowed, the Lakers would clearly have the edge, especially if they met the Clippers, but without them, Kawhi Leonard and Paul George can light it up at any moment to give the Lakers all they can handle.

The NBA and Disney (ESPN/ABC) clearly would like the Lakers to take on the Bucks in the Finals, putting their two biggest stars, LeBron and Giannis, front and center. The Rockets' "small ball," three-point-happy squad could cause lots of problems and wouldn't be a bad bet to take a flyer with at +1400, but I'm gonna roll with the Clippers from the West and the Bucks from the East to meet in the Finals.

### *IN CONCLUSION*

Like I said above, all other sports, save football, are back and going. If you'd like a breakdown of the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the NHL or Golf futures or any other sport, please comment and let me know. For now, we're going to stick with the NBA, MLB, and football next month. Thanks for reading the first edition, and if you're on your way to the window to get down, we always leave you with one word... GOODLUCK2YA!

-Stonie

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stonie is an Oakland-born, but currently Nashville-swingin', sports nut who may only be half Greek but was raised in the Greek Orthodox Church in Oakland. A devout Prince Fan who has attended 78 live shows, ALL columns will be posted in purple to honor the Purple Yoda. Fascinated by sports gambling and thrilled that it is finally becoming legal, Stonie will break down sports and look to give you an edge on your way to the ticket window.